

April 16, 2023

Year C: Easter II (Acts 5:27-41 & John 20:19-31)

Welcome to the second Sunday of Easter. The churches won't be so crowded today. The eggs and bunnies are all gone, and the turkeys and hams are all eaten. And on this Sunday, every year, we hear about Doubting Thomas.

People often talk as if doubt is the opposite of faith, and make it sound like a bad thing. But doubt is a part of faith, and the story of Thomas helps to explain how.

Thomas found it hard to accept what his friends were saying. He didn't think they were making it up. He recognized that they believed what they were saying, but couldn't help but be puzzled by the distinct lack of supporting evidence. If what they were telling him was true, then everything in his life, in their lives, and in the whole future of the world, had changed completely. And yet, although they were obviously excited, nothing else seemed to have changed at all.

They still hadn't thrown open the windows and declared the news to the whole world. They still weren't shouting about it in the streets. They had known this news for a whole week and yet here they were, still meeting secretly behind locked doors, still nervously keeping it to themselves. Really, Thomas was **not** the last man to get it after all – he was the first! He was a step ahead of the rest of them. If the entire world had changed so dramatically, and they knew it, there ought to be some change in the way they were behaving.

The gospels give quite different accounts of the resurrection; of who saw what; of who the resurrected Jesus talked to; of what he said, and what he looked like. That, of course, actually makes them more plausible. Reality is never tidy. Witnesses never agree on what they saw, even right after the event, let alone after

they've been re-telling the story for years and years before writing it down.

If all the witnesses do agree, and they all tell the same story, it's a dead give-away that they got together and concocted a fake story, because reality is never that tidy. Each gospel tells different stories about the messiah who was dead and then alive again. Are some true and others not? Or are they all a bit true and a bit muddled? Like I said, reality is never tidy.

We may not realize it, but most of us are pretty good at knowing when something is definitely not true. When we get a call or an email from someone who needs to check all of our bank account and credit card numbers, we make up our minds quite quickly. And we hang up on the recorded message that tells us there will be a Mountie at the door who will arrest us if we don't give him a cheque for \$3,000. Or the e-mail from the Nigerian princess who wants to deposit \$5 million in our bank account for safe-keeping.

But it's not so easy if someone we know and trust is telling us something that's really hard to believe. We can't just dismiss it then. We try to process the thought, and we might say what Thomas said: "Really! I don't believe it! Let me see!" It's not that we don't believe it, so much as that we need more evidence to help in coming to grips with the idea.

God made us to be thinking creatures, who question and wonder. We'd love to know things for sure, but we learn early on that life has very few simple answers, and even fewer certainties. Belief in anything – even the simplest day-to-day things – always demands one last little step of faith. Faith is not the opposite of doubt: faith is how we cope with it.

If we had to be absolutely certain before we acted on our beliefs, we would never get through the day.

- We know roads are very dangerous places. But we mostly find the courage to get in our cars and drive anyway.
- We know that planes crash; they disappear; they get blown up. But we find enough faith to believe that this particular plane will probably be safe.
- And just think how terribly dangerous kitchens are! Full of sharp things and poisonous things and potential disasters. But at some point we have to get into the kitchen and trust that the food that comes out of it won't kill us.

Do we never have doubts? Do we never have a moment of fear when the fog and ice is thick on the road? or the plane hits turbulence? or the shrimp tastes a little funny? Of course we do: but we balance our doubts and questions against faith, because if we didn't, we wouldn't be able to cope from day to day.

How much more important it is to wrap our doubts in faith when we are dealing with the great eternal questions. If we can never be absolutely certain that the cake will rise, or the lawn mower will start, why would we expect to be certain about those things that are beyond human perception, just around the corner from our eyes; those things that are perceived by the heart and not the head?

There comes a point when our brains have done all they can, and the heart has to take over. The doubts and fears are still there, but we wrap them in faith and step out anyway, because the alternative is to withdraw from life.

History is full of examples of how governments of one type or another have persuaded people **not** to think, **not** to ponder their doubts. That's how you get

people to do things they would otherwise never do – all the way from petty corruption, to genocide. In that climate, it takes courage to admit doubt. It takes courage to ask difficult questions. And that brings us right back to Thomas—the man who is remembered specifically for expressing doubts and asking tough questions.

Thomas didn't doubt their words so much as he doubted their actions. If the entire world had changed so dramatically, and they knew it, why was there no evidence of it in them? Why were their actions not consistent with their words?

On this Sunday, the week after the feast of the Resurrection, the message is that we need to act on what we believe. Yes, we have doubts sometimes, and we can never be absolutely certain about the best way to go forward. But life's too short to demand certainty. Life only works if we make as much sense of it as we can, and then take that next step and get on with it. That's what faith is for.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! Amen.